

BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly
Held on Monday 15th April 2024 at 6pm



PRESENT

Cllr H Miéville – Chairman of Council
Cllr L Lindsay
Cllr S Hitchings
Cllr P Clark
Cllr R Holmes
Cllr K Herbert arrived 6.53pm

Cllr N Lacey-Clarke - Vice Chairman of Council
Cllr A Cross
Cllr C Stevens
Cllr L Hitchings
Cllr R Carter

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk
Operations Manager

Committee Clerk

Dr Sylvia Hixson Andrews – Blandford Town Museum/Blandford Environmental Trust
Barrie Cooper & Helen Matson – Blandford Youth and Community Centre
Libby Reed & John Tanner - TREADS
Nicci Brown – Blandford Information Centre
Gail Del-Pinto – Blandford Food Bank/Nourish Blandford
Katie Godman-Sinclair – Blandford Fashion Museum
Daniel Cadisch – Citizens Advice Central Dorset
Garry Barker – Blandford Allotments
James Watling – Blandford Stour Valley Band
David Jardine – Blandford Health Walks

IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

No one in attendance

1. **APOLOGIES**

Cllr P Osborne
Cllr B Quayle
Cllr C Jacques

Cllr H White
Cllr S Chapman

2. **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN ASSEMBLY HELD ON 17th APRIL 2023**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED (9 in favour and 1 abstention) that the Minutes are APPROVED and SIGNED.

3. **CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL'S REPORT**

The Chairman of Council, Cllr Miéville, read his annual report for the year 2023/24.

4. **QUESTIONS**

No questions were asked.

5. **PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS**

Blandford Youth and Community Centre

After the previous chairperson resigned in October 2023 Barrie Cooper stepped in as acting Chair, Kayleigh James is Centre Manager and Trustee, Helen Matson is Treasurer and Peter Slocombe, Foundation Governor from The Blandford School also joined the committee.

5. **PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS cont...**

Blandford Youth and Community Centre cont....

They are really pleased that Yvonne Miéville has agreed to join their committee and take on the secretarial role. At present they meet weekly to get things back in order and hope to be in a better position to apply to Blandford Forum Town Council (BFTC) for a Service Level Agreement next year. In the meantime, they are extremely grateful for the £5k that BFTC have granted them this year. With the three-year grant from William Williams of £15k per year and the rent reduction of 50% from The Blandford School they are in a good position to get back on their feet.

The Committee are also pleased to be working with TREADS on a cultural heritage community project. Other projects include offering emotional support for anyone involved with drugs and a Year 6 transition programme for students moving from village schools into secondary school.

They are working to become more of a community centre and now rent space to the Ukulele group. They are hoping to encourage young people to get involved. The community fridge also use space in the centre which is a great opportunity to educate the young people about food and wastage.

They open for three evenings per week and offer extra support for students that are struggling academically. They recently secured a £3k grant from Dorset Council for IT equipment which will provide laptops for the young people to use.

Cllr Carter said it was a huge disappointment when Dorset Council withdrew the funding, and he is pleased the committee are doing such a great job, and their hard work is starting to pay off.

TREADS

John Tanner said there has been a significant change to TREADS constitution recently as they are now working with children from aged 8 up to 25. The decision was made to help younger children as they have noticed that children are reaching puberty earlier and that already there are problems with body image, so they wanted to address this before it escalates.

They offer 1:1 sessions, group sessions and telephone and online support. They hold anti-bullying workshops in schools, including training up anti-bullying ambassadors. Their holiday club initiatives are benefit related for age 5-13 years and offer support during the school holidays.

They are pleased to be working with the Youth Centre, uniting efforts, and offering better value for money. John said although each organisation will continue to concentrate on the areas where they have their own expertise, they will work together wherever possible.

They work with The Friendly Food Club on Cooking Connect – this project connects Ukrainian and local children through food.

They have become a social hub for children with learning disabilities and they are in discussion with Dorset Council NEETS on how they obtain their goals.

John thanked BFTC for the grant and said that along with support from Spetisbury School, Hall & Woodhouse and various fund-raising coffee mornings it has been a huge help, and they are very thankful.

Blandford Town Museum & Blandford Environmental Trust

Sylvia began by thanking the Town Council for the support it has given over the years. The initial agreement not to charge visitors has meant their visitor numbers have increased six-fold which has given them more opportunities to apply for grant funding.

5. **PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS cont...**

Blandford Town Museum & Blandford Environmental Trust Cont...

Working in partnership with other groups has resulted in an increase in visitor numbers, for example, working with the Railway Club has brought visitors in with a passion for railways, opening the garden has brought in lots of gardeners who enjoy working outside in a supportive environment. The Civic Group have also come under their umbrella and the CAN 2022 grant through the Sustainability Forum (which Yvonne is also involved in) has resulted in the Green Fair which is in its third year.

There is lots going on with education – A level students and degree students have all volunteered - this helps the museum but also benefits the students.

They are in desperate need of more storage space and are in discussions with William Williams about leasing extra space and building a temporary structure.

New projects include 3D photography which is easier to display and more accessible. A grant from Heritage Lottery has funded a project for vision impaired visitors and visitors that can't get to the museum. They are working with RNIB, The Macular Society and various senior care centres to create QR codes so visitors can hear a description and a story. They are also looking into using NaviLens, colourful QR codes that can be detected at a distance of up to three metres, and in low-light conditions. This is due to be in place by February 2025.

They have had 6600 visitors and numbers are increasing. They have 45 volunteers and are very fortunate to have such an active group. This all started with the BFTC grant of £2k and they would like to express their thanks.

Sylvia said that the museum is happy to help other groups and if they would like to use their space for fundraising they would be welcome.

Sylvia said even with a year of bad weather and ash tree die back the Blandford Environmental Trust is doing well. Dates for the woodland events will be coming up soon.

Blandford Information Centre

Nicci said they are very pleased that their visitor numbers have increased by 10%. Many of the visitors are either new in the area or looking to move here. There has been a lot more traffic on their website – Nicci expressed her thanks to BFTC for the grant towards this. The majority of queries they receive are how to get around, maps, guides and events, both online and in person. Takings are up too; this is helped by accepting card payments.

Thanks to their volunteers they are able to open six days a week with volunteers being asked to cover 2-3 hour shifts every fortnight. More volunteers are always welcome. They need to dispose of a large ice cream freezer and a Brother printer and are open to offers.

Cllr Cross said that when he drove past the centre looked closed. Nicci said they are aware of this and they have put an A board out but it keeps blowing over.

Blandford Food Bank/Nourish Blandford

Gail said the Community Larder has been running for seven months and they have rebranded to Nourish Blandford. 70 people have signed up to the larder and 30 people are shopping weekly. There are two levels of membership, £5 for a small shop or £7.50 for a larger shop. Sophie Burditt is taking the larder forward. She regularly speaks to the shoppers to find out what they need so she can make sure there is a wide range of stock. Sophie has registered with Lidl as when they do a midday bake, there are often bakery items left at the end of the day which can be collected.

5. PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS cont..

Blandford Food Bank/Nourish Blandford Cont...

They are members of Neighbourly Fair Share where they can buy subsidised goods from supermarkets such as Tesco and Marks and Spencer. The Big Yellow Bus Project and Milldown Primary School both supply surplus fresh vegetables to the larder during the summer.

They have a growing waiting list and although they run in deficit, they are able to sustain this without increasing the deficit. They work closely with the Yew Trust, Victim Support, Sovereign Housing and the GP Practice and over the next three years think they might have to increase their opening hours to full time.

A Dorset Council (DC) Digital Champion has recently joined them offering upskilling and they work closely with the DC Poverty Group. They would like to see more Town Councillors on the group and if anyone wishes to join, please get in touch with Gail.

The Community Money Advice Scheme is up and running. Faithworks would like to find funding for a Finance Resilient Worker who will work with people who contact the larder, helping them to work through their budget.

They will be taking advantage of the training sessions provided by The Friendly Food Club and will be running their own cookery sessions eventually.

The Friendship café and club is open every Tuesday and Thursday from 10am – 2pm. The Thursday Club is a friendship club for people who would like company. There are a variety of activities that change every fortnight.

Gail thanked BFTC and said the Service Level Agreement has helped them enormously.

Citizens Advice

Daniel thanked BFTC for supporting their team in Blandford. Up until March 2024 over 661 local residents in the Blandford Parish area have been helped. There were 3300 issues which proves the complexity of the need. Cost of living is the biggest issue. 62% of people needing help have a disability or a long-term health condition. They've been helping many refugees to help them settle and feel welcome in our communities. More recently they have focussed on longer term help, including an employment project with Ukrainian refugees, translating the skills they've bought from home into work here.

They frequently help with benefits and tax credit and there has been a big increase in housing issues. They work with Nourish Blandford and there has been a 36% increase in work around food security and charitable support.

Being based at the Parish rooms is working well and their presence in the GP surgery is well established. They work closely with the social prescribing team, getting referrals from both GP's and nurses. The cost-of-living caseworker who was based in the BFTC Community room will be moving to the British Legion with the Town Council staff.

Daniel finished by thanking BFTC for all the support.

Blandford Stour Valley Band

James reported a 10% increase in membership, but the age demographic is quite senior – there are only two under 18's in the band at present. They are disappointed to see that the schools don't offer lessons for brass instruments, so they are reaching out to the schools and Dorset Rural Music School to try and get young people interested in music at a young age. They are keen to progress this but it will take around a year to implement.

5. PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS cont..

Blandford Stour Valley Band Cont....

They have done 20 events and they don't charge a huge fee. Without the funding they wouldn't survive as Public Liability and instrument insurance is around £1200 per year. They would like to say a big thank you to BFTC for the funding.

Blandford Allotments

Gary said there are two sites – Lamperds and Elizabeth Road but he'll just talk about Elizabeth Road as its relevant to the grant.

There is 100% occupancy at Elizabeth Road and there is a waiting list. There are lots of things planned, including removing hedges and replacing fence posts. When Wessex Water reported various issues with their pipes it meant they had to close until they could address the issues. They approached the Town Clerk and came up with a plan but as they didn't have the funds they applied to BFTC for a grant. Gary acknowledged that BFTC do not have responsibility for the Elizabeth Road site as they are not statutory allotments so, bearing this in mind, they are extremely grateful to BFTC for the grant and their help in managing the works.

Blandford Fashion Museum

Katie said they are very grateful for the Service Level Agreement received from BFTC. They have been in receipt of it since 2015 when they restored the front gate, fence and carpets. Recently they have repainted some rooms and renovated some mannequins. This year they plan on updating some display space, hanging some quilts and mould proofing some rooms. They have also purchased a new steamer to help with the upkeep of some of their costumes and secured a leaky roof! They are in receipt of a three-year grant from DC.

There has been a 39% increase in visitors in the last year. Current exhibitions include Our Sporting Heritage, The Textile Collection of Elisabeth Frink and Changing Times: The 1920s.

There has been a lot more work on education and with young people. They have two interns on long term placement and A level students from Ferndown, Ringwood, The Blandford School and QE have also volunteered. They are conducting a survey to make the building more accessible using funding granted by the National Lottery. A grant from Dorset Council has funded a DC reminiscence box scheme for people that can't visit the museum. The Library and Blandford Day Centre also take boxes. Subsidised family craft workshops are run once per month on a Saturday morning, and they run online lectures which have attracted attendees from Switzerland and the US!

Blandford Walking for Health

David reported that there are three walks in the summer - two walks on a Wednesday and one walk on a Tuesday evening. Nordic walking, run by Bronwyn takes place on Fridays. They would like to increase the number of attendees as it's a great way for people to socialise, get exercise and feel less isolated. The walks are all run by volunteers and there's no charge. There are orienteering courses in the Marsh and Ham, Stour Meadows and The Milldown, all accessible via an App. The GP Surgery supports the groups and David wanted to thank BFTC for the free use of the Community Room for their meetings.

Blandford Boxing Club – No attendees from boxing club - report sent to Councillors prior to meeting

Cllr Carter said how pleased he was to see that following the Town Council's support the club has gone on to be a great success. He said it's great to see the creative thinking and drive forward.

Blandford Boxing Club cont...

When the SLA was first agreed the club said they would liaise with the police to access youngsters that might be going off the rails. Cllr Carter said it doesn't look like this is happening and wondered if it's because the police haven't the resources. The Committee Clerk will contact the boxing club for clarification.

ACTION: COMMITTEE CLERK

Cllr Miéville said how encouraging these innovative ideas are and how lucky we are to have these groups in Blandford. It is clear that the support BFTC gives the groups is very much needed.

Cllr Miéville thanked the Town Council staff for setting the Pavilion up for the meeting and said what a fantastic job they've done in making it a suitable venue.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 8.06pm.

SIGNED

DATED